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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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(1) POTASH FROM GERMANY, NOT ANY MORE

Before the outbreak of war in 1914, Germany was the chief source of supply of potash salts, so essential in the chemical industry and in the manufacture of fertilizer. When supplies to this continent were cut off, great efforts were made, especially by the United States, to find other sources of potash; in waste from sugar refineries, breweries and cement mills and in certain relatively rare minerals. An intensive investigation of lakes and rock formations in dry areas and in localities where rocks had been formed under arid conditions in ancient times resulted in the discovery of a number of occurrences. Few of these were of commercial value, but a very large deposit of good grade potash salts was later found near Carlsbad, New Mexico. Mining was soon under way and, at the outbreak of the present war, the annual production had reached about $10,000,000. Although, before the war, the United States continued to import nearly twice as much as she produced (approximately two-thirds of it from Germany) she exported about one-third of her output, and the Carlsbad operations are capable of considerable expansion, so that this continent is now in much better shape to take care of the needs in potash than was the case during the first great war.

Through the kindness of Mr. R.M.P. Burnet, Curator of the Carlsbad Museum, the Royal Ontario Museum has recently received a fine collection of the potash minerals from this locality.

Except for a small quantity in the salt deposits in Nova Scotia and in some of the alkaline lakes in the West, there is very little potash found in Canada. It is hoped, however, that valuable deposits may yet be discovered in some of the rock formations of earlier geological ages. It would certainly be a matter of great agricultural and chemical importance if this country were to be assured of a plentiful supply of so valuable an element.

(2) AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS AND CRAFTS

The Royal Ontario Museum has recently placed on display five cases of new acquisitions among the arts and crafts of the American Indian. These include fine examples of wood-carving and a blanket of mountain goat wool from British Columbia; Eskimo work in bone, ivory and stone; tools from prehistoric sites in Ontario; pre-Columbian pottery from Peru; and examples of work from the little-known tribes of the Upper Amazon. Most of these articles are the gifts of friends. Owing to lack of space many of these specimens will have to remain in storage, they are accordingly grouped together as a temporary exhibit.

(3) PREHISTORIC LANDSCAPES

Realistically portrayed on the spacious walls of the Royal Ontario Museum are the major events in the physical and natural history of the earth from its obscure beginning up to the time of the cave-man.

A tour of these pictures, which combine the knowledge of the scientist with the vision of the artist, dramatically reveals a gradually unfolding tale of the earth's formation and of the various types of animals and plants that flourished through the different ages.

The slowly cooling earth; the early oceans inhabited only by spineless creatures; peculiar land plants and fishes; giant insects in vast swamps where grew the trees from which our coal was formed; mighty dinosaurs; strange mammals; and finally cave-man, eking out an existence from the animals and plants he knew and slowly assuming ascendency over all the other creatures that stood in the way of his domination -- ALL THIS and more may be seen at a glance while walking through a couple of your Museum galleries.

(4) OFFENCE AND DEFENCE

In the struggle for existence among animals, as in human conflicts, there are two main factors, assault and defense. There is in nature, as in war, competition between hitting power and defensive armour. Many animals have evolved a hard, horny shell or covering which tends to act as a defense against natural enemies. A striking example of this fact occurs in the fish known as the Birchir which inhabits the region of the Upper White Nile in Sudan. This fish possesses a series of large, overlapping scales which serve as armour. Herons and fish ducks find the Birchir's armour too tough to crack.

The Birchir meets its match, however, in the Boatbill, a giant bird related to the storks and herons. The Boatbill's "blitz" comes in the form of its tremendous bill, armed with a formidable hook and operated by powerful jaw muscles. Against this assault weapon the armour of the Birchir is unavailing and is quickly crushed.

The bird gets its common name from the boatlike shape of its huge bill. This organ has perhaps an even greater resemblance to a wooden shoe or "sabot" and the Arabs have christened the bird Abu Markub, "the father of a shoe". A Boatbill, which has a wingspread of nine feet, is on exhibit in the gallery of foreign animals in the Royal Ontario Museum.

(5) TO "OUT OF TOWN" VISITORS

When in the city visit the Royal Ontario Museum - it happens to be located in Toronto but it belongs to YOU.